In the last fifty years, research on Sephardic Bibles has focused on early manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Fifteenth-century Sephardic Bibles have been neglected by scholars or relegated to the role of comparison with their more famous antecedents.¹

Recent research on several fifteenth-century Bibles—most of them in the holdings of Italian libraries—has shown that reconsideration and study of this family of manuscripts is essential for knowledge of the fifteenth-century Sephardic cultural word.² All of the codices in this group are lavishly decorated and may be ascribed to scriptoria that were active in Spain about a decade before the expulsion from Spain and Portugal. The Bibles were probably brought to Italy by Sephardic families who had escaped from Castile and Aragon after the edict of

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² My research was supported by a fellowship from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture. The first results are the following essays: A. Contessa, “Christian Artists for a Jewish Patron: The Fifteenth-Century Imola Bible and its Illustrators,” in Bezalel Narkiss Memorial Volume, ed. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin (forthcoming); idem, “Jewish Book Collection and Patronage in Renaissance Italy,” in Proceedings of the Italia Judaica Jubilee Conference, 2010 (forthcoming); idem, “The Decorative Scheme of an Unknown Fifteenth-Century Sephardic Bible: Jeselsohn Ms. 5” (forthcoming in a monographic volume on this codex to be published by Magnes Press).
expulsion of 1492. They share the same format, *mise-en-page*, textual content, and elegant floral ornamentation. Their small size and wide format is typical of codices that were meant to be used in the synagogue and at home.\(^3\) Some of these Bibles also preserve the original binding in leather with Mudejar decoration, and contain the depiction of the Temple implements.

One of the most interesting among these manuscripts is the Imola Bible, a mid-fifteenth century Sephardic manuscript now in the holdings of the Municipal Library of Imola (Northern Italy). It is an elegant small-dimension codex that is written in Sephardic square script and conserves the original leather binding with Mudejar decorations. The codex contains the complete Hebrew Bible, *Masorah parva* and *magna*; masoretic differences on the Pentateuch between Ben Asher and Ben Naftali, *Alpha beta me-otiot gedolot* and *ze’irot*, and numerous calendar tables among other texts.\(^4\) The decoration program of the Imola Bible includes initial-letter, rectangular panels at the beginning and the end of the biblical books, *parashah* signs, ornamental micrography for the *masorah*, arches that enclose the columns listing the differences between the masoretic versions, rich decorative marginal floral compositions, and finally two exceptional carpet-page miniatures with the Temple implements (figs. 1–3).

Records of sale attest that the Bible was purchased in Naples in 1493. We do not know how the manuscript reached Northern Italy, where thriving Jewish communities lived. The new owners belonged to the Yehudah Arié da Fano family, who possessed the codex for two centuries, as confirmed by registers of birth and death of the Fano family, written by various hands on three blank pages at the beginning

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